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POL 577
Dr. McGuinn
April 4, 2016

India – Pakistan: Challenges to Strategic Stability

Defining Strategic Security in South Asia: A Regional Perspective.

The term “strategic security” is elusive because it contains an extensive range of issues. It may well refer to national, international, or global security issues. For example, on May 31, 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin made use of this term as a synonym for “strategic balance”¹ when defining Russia’s nuclear weapons development programs and Russia’s relationships with the United States and European countries.

Such an interpretation of “strategic security” is close to the classic sense of the term “strategic stability,” which is grounded on mutual insured retaliation and a mutually suitable ratio of the sides’ strategic offensive and defensive arms.²

This understanding could have shaped the basis of the proposal to China by U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in January 2011 to “initiate a strategic security dialogue on nuclear forces, missile defense systems, space, and cyber warfare issues.”³ The elusiveness of the term “strategic

¹ Shchedrov, Oleg. "U.S. "imperialism" Means New Arms Race: Putin." Reuters. March 31, 2007. Accessed March 31, 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-usa-missile-idUSL3147787120070531>.

² John D. Steinbruner, “National Security and the Concept of Strategic Stability,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 22, no. 3 (1978):P. 411; Alexei Arbatov, Vladimir Dvorkin, Sergey Oznobishchev, and Alexander Pikaev, *Strategic Stability after the Cold War* (Moscow: IMEMO, 2010), P. 12.

³ Garamone, Jim. "Gates: Chinese Taking Strategic Dialogue Proposal Seriously." DoD News. January 11, 2011. Accessed March 31, 2016. <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=62397>.

security” was ostensive in the response of Chinese Defense Minister General Liang Guanglie⁴, who persisted on limiting the dialogue to counter piracy, counterterrorism, and peacekeeping (this response also undeniably indicated an aversion to examine issues concerning to nuclear weapons).⁵

The elusiveness of the term holds back official negotiations, but then it can be helpful for the analysis of issues concerning nuclear security in South Asia. Various Indian and Pakistani authors claim that regional nuclear security cannot be explained only in the constricted sense of strategic stability because it is influenced by political, military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural factors.⁶

Taking into consideration that nuclear weapons are the core of strategic security in South Asia, this term will be used in the broader sense for the purposes of this paper, as well as the analysis of political, military, and diplomatic factors of internal and external origin.

Challenges To strategic security in South Asia

India-Pakistan relations are typically defined in terms of conflict, rivalry, or competition. Here a short historical reminder: following India and Pakistan Independence in 1947, there were four wars and major military conflicts between the two countries (in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999).

⁴ "Opening Statement of U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates at Joint Press Conference with Chinese Minister of National Defense Liang Guanglie." Embassy of the United States in Beijing, China. January 10, 2010. Accessed March 31, 2016. <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/011011statement.html>.

⁵ B. Gertz, "China Spurns Strategic Security Talks with U.S.," *Washington Times*, Jan. 10, 2011. Accessed March 30, 2016.

⁶ For example, Zafar Iqbal Cheema, *Indian Nuclear Deterrence: Its Evolution, Development, and Implication for South Asian Security* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), P. 436; Sumit Ganguly and Paul Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (Delhi: Columbia University Press, 2010), PP. 80-81.

The Kashmir quarrels are ones of the major sources of the regional instability. From India's standpoint, it was during the Kashmir discord that Pakistan begun using terrorist groups as a whole part of its regional strategy. Therefore, the assistance of these groups brought more than a few benefits to Pakistan, including strategic (terrorists operating in India brought "strategic depth" and "early warning capabilities" to Pakistan)⁷, military (they were a low-cost instrument with which to wage a proxy war), and political benefits (they were a means to apply indirect pressure on India and intervene in its domestic affairs)⁸. Moreover, regional security was disrupted by additional problems, that is, sharing water from the Indus and territorial disputes over the Rann of Kutch and the Siachen glacier (See map 1). A number of authors consider these three concerns have been settled successfully, however in the view of a number of Pakistani diplomats and experts, the Indus water debate could develop into an intensification of frictions in South Asia.⁹ All of these struggles allowed a high potential for conflict. During the 1980s, in response to these challenges, both India and Pakistan initiated something described as a "recessed deterrence."¹⁰

⁷ John Wilson, "The Jihadi Factor in India-Pakistan Peace Process," ORF Issue Brief, May 2006, P. 2, available at http://www.orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/ib060500_1162634807719.pdf. Accessed March 30, 2016.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Committee on Foreign Relations. "AVOIDING WATER WARS: WATER SCARCITY AND CENTRAL ASIA'S GROWING IMPORTANCE FOR STABILITY IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN." United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. February 22, 2011. Accessed March 31, 2016. www.foreign.senate.gov/.../s-prt-112-10-avoiding-w...

¹⁰ i.e.: Deterrence without nuclear weapons, but on the nuclear threshold. See Naeem Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence: Pakistan's Perspective* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2009), P. 241; Ashley J. Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrence and Ready Arsenal* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 2001), P. 89.

The development of this situation into a state of nuclear deterrence in 1998 may well be deemed a response to the security challenges, along with a security challenge in itself. India and Pakistan seemed to get into a “stability-instability” situation.¹¹

Several experts in India and Pakistan think that each country’s development of nuclear weapons did reach the major goal of preventing its opponent from under-taking a nuclear strike. This “nuclear optimism”¹² can be recognized if the concept of nuclear deterrence is reduced to minimal nuclear deterrence, which is, apparently part of the nuclear stances of both states. However, there are couple counterarguments. First, nuclear weapons did not put a stop to conflicts between India and Pakistan, this include the Kargil armed conflict in 1999.¹³ These conflicts reduced the level of risk for a nuclear war. According to India’s experts,¹⁴ “this level diminished further by every terrorist attack in India that can be linked up to Pakistan.” Secondly, it can be assumed that in the absence of military parity in South Asia and the somewhat underdeveloped nuclear weapons of India and Pakistan do not permit these states to create an efficient mutual nuclear deterrence (see Figures 1 to 5 and Table 1). According to these charts, India and Pakistan have a relative parity only in nuclear force numbers. Nevertheless, this similarity is diminished by the large differences in their nuclear postures.

¹¹ Michael Krepon and Chris Gagné, eds., *The Stability-Instability Paradox: Nuclear Weapons and Brinksmanship in South Asia* (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, June 2001), P. VII.

¹² Kroenig, Matthew. "The History of Proliferation Optimism: Does It Have A Future?" *The Nonproliferation Policy Education Center: NPEC*. June 04, 2012. Accessed March 31, 2016.

¹³ Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/global/global-conflict-tracker>. Accessed March 31, 2016.

¹⁴ Dr. Sandeep Kohale

As Zafar Iqbal Cheema claims in his study, *“Indian Nuclear Deterrence,”* “peace and security, and the very survival of the South Asian subcontinent, depend on the robustness of nuclear deterrence and strategic stability.”¹⁵ Then Cheema pursues, “there are some developments within the larger framework of strategic stability,” that is, “deterrence stability and crisis stability.”¹⁶ Cheema argues that a number of trends will have a dangerous impact on India and Pakistan’s strategic stability, the state of conventional military and nuclear weapons capabilities, the arms race in both arenas, and the effect of asymmetry in conventional military capabilities on deterrence and strategic stability. The management and resolution of India-Pakistan difference of opinion over issues of crucial interest to both countries, “the state of political and diplomatic relations, adherence to a security regime, and confidence-building measures are equally important.”¹⁷ In comparing two key elements of strategic stability in nowadays South Asia with the similar elements of strategic stability in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States throughout the Cold War era, it is likely to find a number of divergences as well as similarities. These relate to the acknowledgement of the theory of mutual assured destruction (MAD), which bring about the possibility of a nuclear war low, and an implied acceptance of the idea of strategic parity regardless of the diverse mix of nuclear forces.¹⁸ Both India and Pakistan have stated that they would adhere to credible minimum deterrence.¹⁹ Its major objective is to

¹⁵ Cheema, *“Indian Nuclear Deterrence,”* P. 436.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Dvorkin, Vladimir. "Deterrence and Strategic Stability." *Nuclear Energy Prospects and the South Asian Standoff.* 2012. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed March 30, 2016.

¹⁸ I. Sergeyev, “The No-First-Strike Option,” *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, Nov. 13, 2001. Accessed March 30, 2016.

¹⁹ Ibid.

prevent the use of WMDs by the other side (in India's case) and to prevent an unfavorable war in which both WMDs and conventional weapons are used (in Pakistan's case).²⁰

As far as Pakistan, minimum deterrence cannot be termed in static numbers.²¹ The South Asian Strategic Stability Institute of London claims, "In the absence of mutual restraints, the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan and its deployment pattern can be changed due to risks of preemption and interception of the Indian nuclear systems."²² Then pursues giving, for example, the U.S.-India nuclear deal of 2008, from Pakistani experts' point of view, has permitted India to enhance and expand its nuclear arsenal, and U.S.-Indian collaboration has aided India to build up its ballistic missile defense (BMD) technologies.²³

As a result, Pakistan held the right to build up its number of nuclear warheads and develop its delivery systems, which is why it declined to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)²⁴ and the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT).²⁵ Even though India signs and ratifies

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Salik, "The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence," P. 230.

²² See reports of the South Asian Strategic Stability Institute, London: U. Choudhury, The Indo-USA Nuclear Deal and Its Impact on India's Ballistic Missile Programme , Research Report 17, June 2008; N. Mirza and M. Sadiq, Indo-US 123 Agreement: Impacts on Deterrence Stability in South Asia, Research Report 7, Jan. 2008.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Kazi, Reshmi. "India Is a De Facto Member of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty." Institutes for Defense Studies and Analyses. December 24, 2014. Accessed March 31, 2016. http://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/Indiaisadefactomemberof_rkazi_241214.

²⁵ Mian, Zia, and A.H. Nayyar. "Playing the Nuclear Game: Pakistan and the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty." Arms Control Association. April 2010. Accessed March 30, 2016. https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2010_04/Mian.

these treaties, Pakistan will not be enticed in following suit.²⁶ In present circumstances Pakistan will barely use this right; nonetheless, Islamabad is keeping this option open.²⁷

Both optimists and pessimists agree that nuclear weapons proliferation in South Asia will not end to an intentional outbreak of large-scale war. Neither Indian nor Pakistani leaders aspire to start a conflict that could end in a nuclear exchange with catastrophic magnitudes.²⁸ Nevertheless, a disastrous conflict could arise even though neither the Indians nor the Pakistanis wish to start a nuclear war. Therefore, according to Ganguly and Kapur (2010), the pessimists believe that a nuclear confrontation is likely to occur, mainly in view of the still immature nuclear control systems and missile attack warning systems.²⁹ On the other hand, the optimists claim that this tragedy in a nuclear South Asia is still unlikely, due to the practice of decreased combat readiness during peacetime, that is, the “operationally dormant”³⁰ state of nuclear arsenals, “under which it would take India and Pakistan from a couple of hours to several weeks to restore their retaliatory capabilities.”³¹

In regard to another aspect of the Cold War’s strategic stability, the restrictions placed on offensive nuclear weapons, which help avert an unrestricted arms race. In this case, there is no

²⁶ Yusuf, Moeed. "Predicting Proliferation: The History of the Future of Nuclear Weapons." Foreign Policy at Brookings. November 11, 2009. Accessed March 31, 2016.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ganguly and Kapur, “*India, Pakistan, and the Bomb*,” March, 2010. P. 85.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ramesh, Jairam. "A Conflict Management Agreement Is a Must for Nuclear South Asia." India Today. December 17, 2001. Accessed March 31, 2016. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/a-conflict-management-agreement-is-a-must-for-nuclear-south-asia/1/231957.html>.

³¹ G. Chufrin, V. Belokrenitsky, V. Moskalenko, and T. Shaumyan, “South Asia,” in *Nuclear Weapons After the Cold War*, eds. A. Arbatov and V. Dvorkin (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2008), P. 336.

understanding between India and Pakistan in this area. Additionally, neither India nor Pakistan is willing to give any control of its own nuclear arsenals by the other country. Moreover, in nuclear arms control there is a profound divergence of interests between India and Pakistan. The reality is that, India is more anxious in controlling China's nuclear arsenals than it is in controlling Pakistan's.³² China displays no interest in trading data with India or in an accord with India on restricting nuclear weapons. Although, Pakistan would like to have an understanding with India on nuclear arms control, India is not interested in an agreement with Pakistan.³³

External Factors

By means of external factors, it intends to include all the factors beyond the nuclear juxtaposition of India and Pakistan. External factors that undermine the strategic stability in the region include the following³⁴: 1. The high threats of non-nuclear conflicts in South Asia; 2. Cross-border terrorism; 3. The conventional disparity in South Asia; and 4. The "horizontal" proliferation of military technologies. The problematic of a horizontal proliferation is complicated, implicating the "Khan network"³⁵ and Pakistan's nuclear contacts with China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Libya, Iraq, Syria and Iran.³⁶ In the past,

³² Feinstein, Lee, James C. Clade, Lewis A. Dunn, and David Albright. "U.S. Policy toward India and Pakistan after September 11." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. May 2002. Accessed April 01, 2016. <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/wp27.pdf>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Khan, Feroz Hassan. "Reducing the Risk of Nuclear War in South Asia." An Article for NPEC's Book Pakistan's Nuclear Future: Reining in the Risks. August 12, 2009. Accessed April 01, 2016. <http://www.npolicy.org/article.php?aid=112&rid=6>.

³⁵ Pakistani scientist, Abdul Qadeer Khan. See The Economist. "A Hero at Home, a Villain Abroad." The Nuclear Network of A.Q. Khan. June 19, 2008. Accessed April 01, 2016. <http://www.economist.com/node/11585265>.

³⁶ Farwell, James P. The Pakistan Cauldron: Conspiracy, Assassination & Instability. Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011. P. 8.

Pakistan accepted assistance from North Korea in improving its nuclear energy industry and missile technologies.

A collaboration with the DPRK might have furthered both the development of missile technology in Pakistan and to the development of North Korea's military nuclear program.

According to S. M. Hersh (2003), data from the United States shows that Pakistan sets in motion the transfer of nuclear weapons technologies to North Korea in 1997. In exchange, Pakistan secured the technology it needed to enhance intermediate range missiles.³⁷

Nevertheless, Islamabad strongly denies any correlation between missile development in Pakistan and North Korea's military nuclear program.³⁸ It argues that the "Khan network" is to be held responsible for the transfer of nuclear technologies to North Korea.

Even with the removal of this network in 2003-2004, some of its aspects could still be operational.³⁹ Ultimately, this network had connections with other nuclear black markets that continued to exist. In other words, such markets typically form around nations that would like to advance nuclear programs, but lack the resources to do so, or those that lack the opportunity to import overtly on the international market.⁴⁰ As a result, at different times such markets have appeared around India, Iraq, Iran, Libya, and North Korea. Apart from this, Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, Israel, Syria, and the Republic of South Africa, as well as several companies in Australia,

³⁷ S. M. Hersh, "The Cold Test: What the Administration Knew about Pakistan and the North Korean Nuclear Program," *New Yorker*, Jan. 27, 2003. Accessed March 29, 2016.

³⁸ See P. Musharraf's statement: "It [North Korea's missile technology deal with Pakistan. —P. T.] did not — [I] repeat, not — involve any deal whatsoever for reverse transfer of nuclear technology, as some uninformed sources have speculated." (P. Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* [London: Simon & Schuster, 2006], P. 286).

³⁹ "AQ Khan Network Still Alive: US Think Tank," *Times of India*, Sept. 8, 2006.

⁴⁰ S.M. Hersh.

Germany, Malaysia, the United States, Switzerland, and other countries, have trafficked nuclear materials and technologies.⁴¹

External Powers

First and foremost, the Indian and Pakistani dossiers are challenging for the nonproliferation regime. Generally the nonproliferation regime is not a priority for the regional organizations of which India and Pakistan are members or observers (SAARC, SCO, ASEAN, ECO, and OIC).⁴² These organizations can take part in a positive role in improving strategic security in South Asia, however, their capacity for consolidating nuclear security is less than that of the nonproliferation organizations and some countries. The nuclear weapons states (mainly the United States, Russia, and China) should display to other states their fervent commitment to nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, not simply through the new START Treaty but also through START follow-up, ratification of the CTBT, and finalizing the FMCT.⁴³ Additionally, India and Pakistan should be implicated in the nonproliferation regimes on a nondiscriminatory basis (IAEA, NSG, MTCR, etc.)⁴⁴. This allegiance should not set a bad example to the nuclear states.

⁴¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Nuclear Black Markets: Pakistan, A. Q. Khan and the Rise of Proliferation Networks* (London: ISIS, 2007), PP. 43-64.

⁴² Brohi, Nasurullah. "STRATEGIC ALIGNMENTS AT SCO: PROSPECTS FOR INDIA-PAKISTAN BILATERAL RELATIONS." *Modern Diplomacy*. November 17, 2015. Accessed April 01, 2016. http://moderndiplomacy.eu/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1089:strategic-alignments-at-sco-prospects-for-india-pakistan-bilateral-relations&Itemid=645.

⁴³ Pikayev, A. A., "Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons," In *Nuclear Proliferation: New Technology, Weapons and Treaties*, ed. A.G. Arbatov and V. Z. Dvorkin (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2009), *The News*, Oct. 2, 2001. Accessed March 30, 2016.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

As Feroz Hassan Khan recommends, the best way to attain strategic stability in this region is by creating structures for peace and security, moreover, an airtight framework for “conventional war avoidance and formalizing the non-deployed status of nuclear weapons.”⁴⁵ Modern history has revealed that confidence on the “nuclear umbrella sheltering South Asia”⁴⁶ seems to have given militaries on both sides of the border additional strategic room with respect to maintaining low intensity warfare and intensifying conventional war fighting doctrines.⁴⁷ Additionally, this chapter has debated that the most plausible cause of a nuclear exchange on the subcontinent will be a consequence of conventional war escalation, either through accident in “the fog of war”⁴⁸ or to protocols, and less due to accidental blastoffs.

Pakistan’s future will keep on being in the mistiness of predicaments with India, frightened by the “specter of nuclear war.”⁴⁹ As recognized by Michael Krepon, regardless of the best efforts of theorists and analysts in the West and in South Asia, escalation is not easy to control.⁵⁰ Hopeful plans for restrained and limited warfare presume that rivals have deep enough grievances to clash over, but that they will desire to fight by an established set of rules. We now know from studying war strategy from the Cold War that this enthusiastic assumption was not compelling nor does

⁴⁵ Khan, Feroz Hassan. "Reducing the Risk of Nuclear War in South Asia." An Article for NPEC's Book Pakistan's Nuclear Future: Reining in the Risks. August 12, 2009. Accessed April 01, 2016. <http://www.npolicy.org/article.php?aid=112&rid=6>

⁴⁶ Terms taken from Mr. Feroz Hassan Khan.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mr. Robert Strange McNamara. Dec. 2003.

⁴⁹ Michael Krepon, Rodney W. Jones and Ziad Haider (eds.), *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option in South Asia*. Accessed March 29, 2016.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

this supposition take into account the issue of “unconventional warfare in the subcontinent.”⁵¹

Both India and Pakistan’s leadership should be resolute and should seek out to get rid of uncertainties and insecurity that predominate in this region by solving all remaining disputes with each other peacefully. India, perhaps does not understand the consequences of constant tensions in South Asia. Whether India endeavors to exercise limited war options to reconcile its problems with Pakistan, a deed that might deteriorate to the level of mutual destruction, or upholds the status quo on lasting disputes, South Asia will stay unstable.⁵² Security concerns limit Pakistan’s policy options, however, granted a choice, it would certainly focus internally on economic revival and national integration intended to complete “the vision of Pakistan as a liberal, tolerant, progressive, dynamic, and strong, but enlightened moderate Islamic state where theocracy will have no place.”⁵³ A similar formula focusing on human development is by the same token applicable to India as well. The hallmark for reaching these objectives is, stability, and it can be attained only if both countries at once take credible steps based on ground realities. These steps will avert war and offer durable peace to the people of South Asia.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Subhash Kapila, “India’s New “Cold start” War Doctrine Strategically Revised,” Strategic Affairs with South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 991, (May 4, 2004). Accessed April 1, 2016.

⁵³ Chambers, Michael R. "SOUTH ASIA IN 2020: FUTURE STRATEGIC BALANCES AND ALLIANCES." Strategic Studies Institute. November 2002. Accessed April 01, 2016. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/00105.pdf>.

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2016,” Nonproliferation Review, Vol. 13. No.3, November 2006.

Map 1: Indo- Pakistani border; Siachen Glacier.



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Map 1. The Ronn and Siachen Glacier, Kashmir.

